



**National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**  
Our Mission: Save lives, prevent injuries, reduce vehicle-related crashes



**DOT 103-09**  
**Monday, July 13, 2009**

**Contact: Ellen Martin**  
**Telephone: (202) 366-9550**

## **New Roadside Survey Shows Steady Decline in Alcohol Levels, while Driver Drug Use is Detected**

A new roadside survey by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration confirms a continuing decline in the percentage of legally intoxicated drivers

In 1973, 7.5 percent of drivers had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 or higher. In the latest survey, that figure had fallen to 2.2 percent. A BAC of .08 or higher is now above the legal limit in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Previous roadside surveys conducted by NHTSA have measured only alcohol. But the 2007 survey used new screening techniques that detected other substances as well and in the future may help show the extent of drug impairment among drivers.

The survey found 16.3 percent of nighttime weekend drivers were drug positive. The survey focused on weekend nighttime drivers and found that the drugs used most commonly by drivers were: marijuana (8.6 percent); cocaine (3.9 percent); and over-the-counter and prescription drugs (3.9 percent).

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said he is concerned about the prevalence of drivers who use drugs, and we should continue to fight against all impaired drivers.

"I'm pleased to see that our battle against drunk driving is succeeding," said Secretary LaHood. "However, alcohol still kills 13,000 people a year on our roads and we must continue to be vigilant in our efforts to prevent drunk driving."

"This troubling data shows us, for the first time, the scope of drugged driving in America, and reinforces the need to reduce drug abuse," said Gil Kerlikowske, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. "Drugged driving, like drunk driving, is a matter of public safety and health. It puts us all at risk and must be prevented."

NHTSA is conducting further research to assess how drug traces correspond to driver impairment since some drugs can remain in the body for days or even weeks. Should further research indicate that drugs pose the same type of traffic safety risk as alcohol, NHTSA is committed to applying lessons learned in fighting the drunk driving problem.

Among the findings of the latest roadside survey are these:

- The percentage of male drivers with illegal BAC levels was 42 percent higher than the percentage of alcohol-impaired female drivers.
- Drivers were more likely to be illegally drunk during late nighttime hours (1 a.m. to 3 a.m.) than during daytime or early evening hours.
- Motorcycle riders were more than twice as likely as passenger vehicle drivers to be drunk (5.6 percent compared with 2.3 percent). Pickup truck drivers were the next most likely to have illegal BACs (3.3 percent).

The 2007 survey involved more than 300 roadside locations throughout the U.S. Click [here](#) to view the

Research Note.